

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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ADMINISTRATION AND PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY  
IN INDIA

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BARABATI STADIUM HALL, CUTTACK  
DECEMBER 19, 1958



## ADMINISTRATION AND PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

GENTLEMEN,

The Governor of your State, Shri Sukthankar, who has himself had a distinguished administrative career, suggested that I should address this Regional Institute of Public Administration. Being only a student of Political Science myself, I was somewhat hesitant to address an audience composed of seasoned administrators, but I could not disappoint my host. I am happy to be among you today and have chosen for my brief speech the topic "Administration and Parliamentary Democracy in India". During the present century our country has produced a series of outstanding administrators who could compare in calibre with the best anywhere in the world. Although it is true that the Indian Civil Service was the creation of our foreign rulers yet it must be admitted that the system and the service were of a high standard which we must try and maintain. The present and the future, however, hold out a number of new problems and it is my intention here to touch briefly upon some of these.

2. By way of introduction it might be helpful to enumerate some of the important features of our parliamentary system of Government which effect administrative functioning :—

- (i) The supremacy of Parliament, subject to the provisions of our 'quasi-federal' Constitution under which there are a multiplicity of jurisdictions. The State Legislatures also enjoy supremacy within their respective spheres subject again to constitutional provisions;
- (ii) The responsibility of Ministers, jointly and individually, to the Parliament and State Legislatures, and the observance of practices associated with the Cabinet system of Government both in respect of policy-making and administration;
- (iii) Periodic elections to the Legislatures on the basis of universal adult franchise;

- (iv) Multiplicity of political parties and the important role of the main opposition parties;
- (v) Rule of law, including fundamental rights of citizens guaranteed in the Constitution, and the independence of the judiciary;
- (vi) The subordination of the Armed Forces to civil authority;
- (vii) A permanent non-political civil service, including various expert agencies of administration, which is expected to maintain the continuity and stability of the administration despite the vagaries and vicissitudes of party politics. Part XIV of our Constitution deals at some length with Services under the Union and the States. In this section the non-political nature of the services is sought to be maintained and provision is also made for Public Service Commissions both at the Centre and in the States to ensure a high standard of recruitment and security regarding conditions of service.

3. These broad features have been mentioned merely to serve as the canvas against which we can better study the working of the administrative machinery. But before coming to the problems which this machinery has to face it is necessary to say a few words with regard to the present position of democracy in our country. In India today we have embarked upon the greatest experiment in democracy the world has ever witnessed. But it is worthwhile to keep in mind that the parliamentary system which has been adopted in our Constitution is not an indigenous growth but has been largely based upon western modes. This is not to say that we have no tradition of democracy in India. On the contrary, our ancient records show that many centuries ago various democratic institutions, including elected republican assemblies, flourished in our country and we also have an unbroken tradition of 'village democracy' embodied in our system of Gram Panchayats. But nevertheless the fact remains that parliamentary democracy, as we know it today, is comparatively new to

India. It was first introduced in rudimentary form by the British towards the end of the last century and gradually developed on the basis of various Reform Acts culminating in the Government of India Act. 1935. Our own Constituent Assembly based the new Constitution to a considerable extent on this Act and also adopted a large number of new provisions. This Constitution came into effect less than 10 years ago and we must therefore remember that parliamentary democracy in India is yet a tender sapling which has to be carefully and painstakingly nourished if it is to grow into a sturdy tree. One sometimes notices a deplorable tendency to take democracy for granted just because it has been embodied in our Constitution. Such complacency is positively dangerous; particularly at a time when parliamentary democracy in Asia and even in Europe seems to have entered a period of decline. Recent events in many countries including our nearest neighbours have shown clearly how fragile its structure really is and how it can almost overnight be swept into oblivion. We must therefore realize that no political or constitutional system can be considered sacrosanct, and that unless it functions at a reasonable level of efficiency and integrity and fulfils at least partially the growing demands and requirements of its people its very existence will be gravely jeopardized. It is in this context that I would like to draw your attention to the crucial role that the administrative system plays in the successful functioning of a parliamentary democracy. Of course there are numerous other social, economic and political factors that will ultimately determine its destiny, but there can be little doubt that administration is one very important factor, and it is to this aspect that I will now turn.

4. Political ideals and principles are of course important in a system of Government but to the common man it is in the final analysis their concretization that matters. The functions of the State all over the world have grown tremendously in the course of the present century. At one time the laissez-faire theory of the State was generally accepted whereby it was expected only to maintain the broad framework of law and order confining its interference in the life of the people to the bare

minimum necessary for this purpose. But this view has long since given way to a much more positive conception of the State as an active instrument for moulding society. This vast expansion in the activities of the State is now a universal feature and is not confined to countries professing any particular ideology. Whether the political philosophy upon which a State is based is parliamentary democracy, communism or military dictatorship the State in every case is endowed with a plenitude of powers and functions whereby its activities affect the lives of each one of its citizens in a myriad ways. The difference in a parliamentary democracy is that free public criticism of Governmental policy and administration is allowed. In our country we have adopted as our goal what has been rather vaguely termed a 'socialistic pattern of society'. Whatever may be the precise implications of this term it is clear that ours is a welfare State, a State in which the governmental apparatus will be and is being progressively used to influence, mould and determine matters concerning almost every aspect of public and many aspects of private life. In this context the manner in which this governmental authority is administered will have a direct impact upon all facets of our corporate life and it will be to a large extent on this basis that the masses will weigh in the balance our system of parliamentary democracy. Only a tiny fraction of our people have even a nodding acquaintance with political theories, but every citizen is brought into contact with and therefore of necessity judges the calibre and quality of the administrative machinery.

5. There are two main factors in the light of which an administrative system is judged by the people. The first factor may be termed 'efficiency'. Does the administrative system deal with the people and their problems in a reasonably efficient manner? Does it get things done or is it hopelessly bogged down in an ocean of delays and redtape? Is it flexible and resilient, responsive to new ideas and fired with enthusiasm, or has bureaucratic rigor-mortis set it to such an extent that nothing can change its stolid unimaginative functioning? Are remediable grievances removed within reasonable time? In particular, do the departments dealing with foodgrains and essential commodities

function in a manner which does not cause avoidable hardship and inconvenience? For the agricultural population the standard of Revenue administration is extremely important. Does the revenue system and also the new hierarchy of Community Development and National Extension Service administration function satisfactorily? All these questions are contained within the word 'efficiency' and this is the first important factor in evaluating an administrative system. The second factor may be termed 'integrity'. It is sad to see that moral standards in this country seem to be on the decline, and it is generally admitted that corruption and nepotism have not only not been eradicated but have established themselves in almost all spheres of administrative functioning. It is this corruption that eats like a canker into our body politic, eroding the idealism of our youth and indeed discrediting our whole system of parliamentary democracy. Unless this can be decreased to the irreducible minimum we will have to face serious problems in the future.

6. The unprecedented burden that the welfare State has placed upon the administrative machinery has brought with it a whole crop of fresh problems. While the field is very vast we might try and pinpoint a few of the broader problems that are being faced in the field of administration since independence :—

- (a) To begin with, there is the problem of decentralization of power and authority. Administrative functions have greatly increased and the important question is to find the best arrangement for distributing work whereby optimum efficiency can be attained. It has been invariably found that an overcentralization of authority tends to lower administrative efficiency. Political leaders should confine themselves to laying down the broad contours of policy, leaving the detailed execution in the hands of the administrative services. The frequently observed tendency to concentrate all powers and functions around one or a few politicians is a deplorable one as it saps initiative in the civil service and thus hampers the smooth execution of

work. It is not adequately realized that a sane devolution of functions does not decrease the authority of the superior but actually increases it because it frees him from unnecessary work which can be done better by some junior person and leaves him more time to devote to his real job of policy-making and broad supervision. This common-sense procedure has for long been accepted in other spheres, such as, for example, the armed forces in which the overall commander would not dream of interfering in the detailed work of his junior formations. He lays down the over-all strategy and leaves the detailed execution in the hands of his subordinate hierarchy. This has the dual advantage of expediting efficient work and also giving younger men the opportunity to shoulder responsibility and thus gain invaluable experience. But in our country since Independence it has been found that this sound principle has not always been respected in Government and this is having an adverse effect upon our administration.

(b) This brings us to the obverse question of the influence on policy of the civil service. In the process of carrying out policy framed by the Cabinet and reflected in legislative enactments it is, inevitable that the administrative service at the same time influences that policy to a greater or lesser extent. Of course the precise relationship between a Minister and his Secretariat will be determined on the basis of a varying equilibrium of personalities, and an able Minister who knows his own mind and is determined to put his ideas into effect will be able in most cases to have his way. But a Minister who is distinguished neither by his intellectual ability nor administrative competence is likely to be more influenced by the 'departmental policy' which has developed over the years and which is very likely to be conservative in temper. This also raises the question, forcibly brought into public notice recently in

the Mundhra affair, of the division of responsibility between the Minister and his senior Secretaries. In our young democracy conventions are still in the process of being established, but I think we can with benefit study the British practice and adapt it to our own peculiar conditions.

- (c) Another interesting matter relates to the exact status and functions of so-called 'Junior' Ministers—Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers. It is sometimes found that as the result of a certain ambiguity regarding their precise functions embarrassing situations arise in which far from expediting work the whole administration gets into an unnecessary tangle. It is obviously desirable that where such Ministers exist their functions and sphere of responsibility should be clearly defined to enable them to make some real contribution.
- (d) A whole spectrum of problems have arisen in the light of relationships between the Government of India and the State Governments. Our Constitution has been described as quasi-federal because of the strong centralized bias particularly in the event of a national emergency. But nevertheless there is a clear division of administrative functions between the States and the Centre in a large number of subjects although jurisdiction in regard to the Concurrent list naturally tends to overlap. At the same time planning is being undertaken on a national basis and all the States are to a considerable extent dependent upon central assistance for their developmental plans. As such, there is a constant relationship between the State and Central administrative machinery and it has been found that in many cases unnecessary delays take place as a result of lack of co-ordination or avoidable duplication. The Planning Commission with its own series of official procedures also causes certain problems of this type. This

is an important sphere upon which closer study is called for. Another problem closely connected with this is the question of disparity in remuneration and other benefits as between the Central and State services and also between States *inter se*, which is the cause of a good deal of friction and often discontent.

(e) There has been in our first two Plans a progressive expansion in the public sector and vast multipurpose River Valley Projects and semi-autonomous corporations have come into being which spend many crores of rupees in key sectors of the national economy. These bodies have raised peculiar administrative problems, both in their internal functioning and in their relation to the State and Central Governments, as they represent as it were a third type of administrative jurisdiction distinct from both. As time passes these corporations are likely to grow in importance, and it is clear that the conventional system of administration will hardly be adequate to cope with their demands. This applies equally to the huge industrial undertakings in the Public Sector.

(f) Public corporations and industrial undertakings bring to the fore the question of the adequacy of our audit system. The present procedure which is used in Government offices is hardly capable even of dealing with routine work, and the new requirements demand an overhaul of both audit and accounting systems to bring them in line with commercial procedures. It is a mistake to think that Government commercial concerns need not be run on strict business lines. On the contrary they should be models of business efficiency, and indeed apart from ideological considerations this will be one of the main justifications for Government undertakings. The audit must include a physical check as to how far the operations of public industries function efficiently in terms of

the cost-price dichotomy. Even in routine Government departments concerned with public utility services, specially Public Works Departments, it is time a system of 'Efficiency Audit' was introduced which would subject them to tests in terms of functional results. The present routine system is not able to prevent the vast drainage of public funds into unremunerative channels that takes place in these departments.

- (g) The advent of freedom in India has also naturally led to the increasing importance of political parties and the emergence of various pressure groups which have a direct impact upon the administrative machinery. It must be admitted that this impact is not always favourable and one of the heaviest crosses that an administration has to bear is the constant tendency by political forces to interfere in its day-to-day functioning.
- (h) The whole problem of recruitment of administrative personnel has also been greatly affected. It is clear that in order to meet the growing needs of the country the system of recruitment will have to be adequately remoulded. So far there has been more stress laid upon what may be termed general administration, but with the increasingly specialized nature of State functions, especially those connected with economic and industrial administration, the emphasis is necessarily shifting to the recruitment of experts. Allied to this is the question of proper training for administrators. Previously the top-echelons of the administrative service used to undertake their training in England, but now that we are free from foreign domination we have got to set up in our own country a training system the products of which will in no way be inferior to the British-trained civil servants. It is gratifying to note that steps have been taken in the right direction and the results so far are certainly

encouraging. Every year I have occasion to meet batches of young I. A. S. and I. F. S. probationers who come to Kashmir in the course of their training for undergoing attachment with army units. I have been much impressed by these young men and women of my own generation and I am confident that in their hands the future of our country is safe. The establishment recently of the Administrative Staff College of India at Hyderabad, though it does not exclusively cater to Government administration, is an interesting and commendable venture. Various, other administrative colleges and institutions have been set up in the country, and these deserve special attention so that they maintain a uniformly high standard, both in the All-India and the State cadres. Training must emphasize equally the theoretical as well as the practical aspects, and the proper handling of human relations, or man-management as it is sometimes called, must also be given due attention. Of course the question of administrative training is closely linked with the general question of educational standards, upon the alarming decline of which many competent observers have commented, but this is a broader matter into which it is not possible to enter here.

- i) Stress has rightly been laid by our Planners upon the supreme importance of eliciting public participation and co-operation in the task of nation-building. In India where the concepts of parliamentary democracy and the welfare State are sought to be combined it is not enough merely for a Governmental machinery, howsoever complex, to administer. It is equally important that the masses be infused with the spirit of responsive co-operation so that they can actively help in bettering their lot. The tendency to depend too much upon official help and activity is a deplorable one and it is of the utmost importance that

local initiative and enterprise be elicited to the maximum extent possible. This is the theory underlying our Community Development and National Extension Service movements and the co-operative movement also is based upon this principle. It is important that our administrators should have a full awareness of this aspect of the problem and that they should develop the ability not only to function within the four corners of their official assignments but also to evoke from the people with whom they come into contact active co-operation in the supreme task of nation-building. This is particularly important in the rural areas where the administrator must identify himself with the villagers and shed the old superior and rather supercilious attitude of dealing with them.

7. I have attempted in this short paper to give only a very broad review of some of the important problems that have arisen in the sphere of administration in our country. I am aware that the list I have given is by no means exhaustive, nor have I even tried to indicate solutions, firstly because I am hardly competent to do so and secondly because there are no easy solutions. A full awareness of the problems is the first step towards meeting them intelligently. I am sure that most of you in the audience have a much more detailed knowledge of the various aspects that I have touched upon and are also constantly trying to find the best method of dealing with these matters. At a time when we are striving to advance rapidly on the economic and social fronts by a process of planned development the Services have, as never before, a crucial role to play in moulding the destiny of India. All I would like to say in closing is this that the possibilities before our country are enormous. We have the natural resources and we have the man-power. The main problem is to mobilize these resources and this man-power in a mighty concerted effort to lift our country out of the morass of poverty into which it has fallen for many centuries. This is indeed a staggering task both on the political and the administrative planes. We have next door to us our neighbour

China who is facing similar problems and is dealing with it somewhat different manner. Let it not be said by future gen, that we in India did not prove capable of meeting this challenge.

**CUTTACK,**  
December 19 th, 1958.

**UTKAL UNIVERSITY PRESS, CUTTACK- 500-18.12.58.**